Review
Reviewed Work(s): A Band of Prophets: The Vanderbilt Agrarians after Fifty Years by William C. Harvard and Walter Sullivan
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Source: *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (Jul., 1983), pp. 114-115

A Band of Prophets: The Vanderbilt Agrarians After Fifty Years. Edited by William C. Harvard and Walter Sullivan. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982. Pp. x+191. Acknowledgments, introduction, discussion, and notes on participants. $25.)

Altogether fittingly, *A Band of Prophets* appears, just as the subtitle suggests, a half century after *I'll Take My Stand* gave the Fugitives/Agrarians immediate ridicule and eventual fame. Delivered at a conference held at Vanderbilt University, the six essays in this volume commemorate the anniversary of the South's "manifesto." The central question they purport to answer is whether or not the Vanderbilt "prophets" were inspired when in 1930 they predicted the end of the South's rural way of life in the face of new industrialism and urbanism just then gaining a foothold below the Mason-Dixon line. In reality, no academic essay needs to show us how prescient these twelve southerners were. To read these six essays, however, brings forth a fresh sadness and poignancy because the South as these Agrarians envisioned it is gone, and we have no hope, as they did, of ever having it again.

The introduction points out that the six essayists are southerners (save one) and come from various academic backgrounds, as did the Agrarians themselves. Nearly all have had some connection with the Agrarians, either as students or colleagues or successors in editorial capacities. As such, they speak with complete understanding and sympathy with the Agrarian viewpoint. In a finely written essay, the historian Charles P. Roland looks at the South in 1920 and finds its prevailing distinctiveness. John Shelton Reed, a sociologist, while not ignoring the southernness of *I'll Take My Stand*, thinks much can be understood about Agrarianism by seeing it as a form of nationalism. Lewis P. Simpson, in a turgid style that hampers understanding, searches for the literary roots of the 1930 book, while Robert Heilman places its roots firmly in the pastoral tradition. George Core, editor of the *Sewanee Review*, traces the careers of the Agrarians and gives sound reasons for their strange lack of success in academic circles. Agrarian critic Louis D. Rubin, Jr., admittedly going over old ground, finds the book rich in literary quality because it makes use of a controlling image: the symbol of the rural South. Finally, the book closes with a somewhat disjointed

discussion between the three living Agrarians—Lyle H. Lanier, Andrew N. Lytle, and Robert Penn Warren.

A Band of Prophets is a fitting tribute to those twelve southerners who fifty years ago worried about what many of us worry about today—the way of life in the South.

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